

An interview with Joe Walker

(1)

JOE WALKER

An Interview Conducted by  
Frances Hughes  
June 16, 1981

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# NARRATOR DATA SHEET

June 16, 1981

DATE

Name of narrator: Joe Walker

Address: 429 S. 29th St., Villa 14, Terre Haute Phone: 235-9473

Birthdate: 12/04/1895 Birthplace: Petersburg, Indiana

Length of residence in Terre Haute: 61 years

Education: Wiley High School

Occupational history: Railroad, public accounting, in electrical business--wholesale

Special interests, activities, etc. Theater, singing, president of the Chamber of Commerce (Terre Haute), member of the Draft Board during World War II. Highland Lawn Cemetery board, senior warden of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Major subject(s) of interview: early radio, transportation, business, Elks Minstrels, downtown Terre Haute

No. of tapes: 2 Length of interview: 3 hours

Terms of legal agreement: \_\_\_\_\_

## Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
06/16/81	2 P.M.	400 S. 29th Street Meadow Green Apts. Terre Haute	Frances E. Hughes

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JOE WALKER

Tape 1

June 16, 1981

Residence of Frances Hughes, 400 S. 29th St., Terre Haute, IN

INTERVIEWER: Frances Hughes

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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FH: I'm Frances Hughes and I'm interviewing Joe Walker, a semi-retired Terre Haute businessman, at 2 o'clock Tuesday afternoon, June 16, at the Meadow Green apartments.

When did you come to Terre Haute, Joe?

WALKER: I came to Terre Haute the first time in 1904. And I later left Terre Haute and came back again in 1920.

FH: How old were you when you came to Terre Haute?

WALKER: When I came to Terre Haute, I was approximately ten years old.

FH: And you are how old now?

WALKER: I am now 85.

FH: You've always lived here -- all that time?

WALKER: I have not lived here all that time.

FH: Did you come with your parents?

WALKER: I came with my parents the first time.

FH: And then you went to high school here, didn't you?

WALKER: Then I graduated from Wiley High School in 1914, the class of '14.

FH: And then what did you do?

WALKER: I then went to work for the Vandalia railroad. The Vandalia railroad is now known as the Pennsylvania railroad.

FH: And then how long were you in Terre Haute with that line?

WALKER: I was in Terre Haute approximately . . . with the Vandalia railroad about 4-1/2 years.

FH: Did you work for them as an accountant or . . .

WALKER: I was just out of high school, and I worked really in the accounting office which was down at the Union Station. I was really an office boy. And I worked my way up to where I had a better position. And about that time the Pennsylvania railroad bought the Vandalia railroad, and I was transferred to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. That was in 1916. In 1920, I was transferred again from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I worked for the Pennsylvania railroad there approximately a year, then returned to Terre Haute in 1920.

FH: And while you were there, did you take some educational work?

WALKER: While I was in Pittsburgh as well as Philadelphia, I took a correspondence course in accounting. And that was the beginning of my entire business life really. No matter what type of business I would get in or what I would do, the accounting always came in handy -- to have that information, to know that I knew accounting.

FH: And now you came back to Terre Haute then, didn't you?

WALKER: I came back to Terre Haute in 1920. That's right. That was after the first World War, and jobs were very scarce. I was very unhappy in Philadelphia. You keep going to bigger cities and you don't know too many people. So I was very unhappy there. That's one of the reasons I wrote that piece of poetry there, which I referred to a minute ago. But going back to Philadelphia, it was quite an experience. That's the home, you know, of so many of the great men. I spent quite a little of my off time in visiting the museums and places of interest in Philadelphia.

FH: Well, then were you transferred back here or did you just leave the Pennsylvania?

WALKER: No. I was not transferred back. I resigned, as you might say today. Actually, I quit. I was

WALKER: very unhappy because a union was being organized that exists today. An [a clerks'] employees' union was being organized in the Pennsylvania railroad. And I didn't have too much service with the company compared to men who had been with the Pennsylvania railroad as much as 25 or 30 years. And my seniority from 1914 to 1920 was only 6 years and I felt that . . . . Talking with my boss who, by the way, happened to be from Indianapolis and was very friendly with me, I asked him what my chances would be in case this union was organized, because of my shorter length of service. And he said, "Well, Joe, I don't know. You may again become an office boy." So, I said, "Well, I don't think I'm going to wait around to find out that some day I'm going to be an office boy." So, I said, "I want to leave." He said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "I want to go back to my hometown of Terre Haute, Indiana."

He said, "Well, Joe, you know I came from Indianapolis. And if I could, I think I would go back to Indiana myself."

So, he said, "I'm going to give you a 30-day pass -- good for 30 days -- and you go back to Terre Haute and see if you can find a job. If you don't find a job, you use this pass and come on back to Philadelphia and I'll have a job for you."

So, I came to Terre Haute and I luckily did. I found a job with the Baines Electric Service Company. Because of my association with the railroads -- and there is a fascination there once you're involved in railroading -- when the last day of my pass arrived, I was a very nervous young man because I was cutting all of my connections with the railroad. I really knew nothing else but that although I used the information that I was an accountant simply because I had worked in the accounting office. But I really was not what you would call a real good accountant. But it, however, enabled me to secure a job with the Baines Electric Service Company.

FH: The union that was organized then, was that the union that [Eugene V.] Debs organized?

WALKER: No, that was not. That was after Debs. This was called the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. It's

WALKER: a very strong union even today in the railroad. That was the time when I was looking for extra money, and I was wanting to try out my experience in my correspondence course in accounting. For a short time, I took the job as secretary of that local after it was organized in Philadelphia. And so I can say that I have been a union man in my life. (chuckles)

FH: Did you have to join the union to become secretary?

WALKER: Oh, yes. I had to join the union, but they couldn't find anybody else to take it. They knew that I was working on accounting because I would spend my noon hours in Pittsburgh and in Philadelphia working on my lessons. The fellow employees would gather around me and kid me about not being able to find a job after I got out or finished my course. But I was successful in fooling them in that.

FH: Now, you came back here when -- in 1921?

WALKER: Nineteen hundred twenty.

FH: Nineteen hundred twenty.

Then how did you happen to go to work for the radio station?

WALKER: Mr. C. C. Baines, who operated a company called the Baines Electric Service Company at 24 South 8th Street in the Odd Fellows building, was a distributor of what is known as Delco lights, and he sold these Delco light plants. That was before the days of rural electrification. He sold these Delco light plants to the farmers. And then they would wire up the house and the barns, and these little Delco plants would give them some power and some light and all that. Well, that was Mr. Baines's business.

And then as time went along, he began to get into the wiring of houses in Terre Haute. Now, one of the things that's really important is the way we think of electricity for everything today. In reality, when you go back to 1920, practically very few of the houses in Terre Haute were wired for lights or electricity of any kind. They used gas lights or maybe the poorer people even used kerosene lamps. But 99% of the people had those gas lights; and finally some of them, thinking electricity was

WALKER: coming along, installed the dual light where the top part was the gas light and the part that turned down was the electric light. And you could have either one if you wanted to.

FH: This was in chandeliers, wasn't it?

WALKER: That was in chandeliers. They started in to wire the homes of the city of Terre Haute. The power company was the Terre Haute, Indianapolis and Eastern Traction Company. They also ran the streetcars. They had a small power plant down here on the Wabash River. Well, the lighting of Terre Haute really began in 1921. So you can see from '21 to '81, that it hasn't been too long that you have really had electricity in Terre Haute.

Before that, there was no such thing as an electric iron. There was no such thing as an electric sweeper. There was no such thing as an electric stove. In fact, they used to make fun about trying to cook on an electric stove -- it took so long that the woman would be worn out trying to stand there waiting for it to heat up. But that was to me a sort of a miracle, that I have lived to see electric lights put in the homes in Terre Haute. There were so many of those houses wired that this man Baines, in the back of his store . . . in his back yard of his building or his store, he had a pile . . . or a stack of old gas lighting fixtures as high as the ceiling of this room where they had been taken out all over the city of Terre Haute.

Now, to get into those old houses and wire them up was very, very difficult. In order to wire the first floor if it was a two-story house, they had to cut into the floor of the second story and then cut through the ceiling of the first floor and then run their wires down through that hole and hook on their chandelier. And they just probably ruined more good oak floors than you can imagine over the years, installing these lights.

FH: Was it Mr. Baines then who got you interested in radio?

WALKER: No. Mr. Baines didn't get me interested in radio. What we were doing at that time was selling



WALKER: radio parts. People were making their own radios. There was no real radio market of brands. You think now of going down and buying a radio. A few people finally got to making what they called a radio, but it was generally a square box. But literally thousands of people bought the parts, the components, and made their own radios; and that was one of the things that created a lot of conversation -- when Mr. Baines got the idea of putting in a transmitter, broadcasting equipment. They're called transmitters. He was a graduate of Rose Polytechnic Institute now, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology. He became a great friend of Professor Knipmeyer.

FH: That was C. C. Knipmeyer?

WALKER: That's it. Professor C. C. Knipmeyer.

Someone at Rose Polytechnic got a franchise from the government to set up a station. And it was possibly conceived as an educational station. And the call letters on that station were WRPI, the "W" is always used now, even to this day. Then you add on the other letters or numbers, whatever. So, it just sort of hung in limbo. Nothing happened.

Baines became very interested in the fact that . . . Rose Polytechnic and him being a graduate, being a friend of Professor Knipmeyer, he felt he could take over the franchise of WRPI.

FH: What did Professor Knipmeyer teach at Rose?

WALKER: Professor Knipmeyer was the head of the electrical engineering department. And in addition to his work at the Rose Polytechnic, he was also a consulting engineer for a number of plants around Terre Haute.

Baines got the idea of getting this franchise transferred to him and was successful. Then in connection with a man by the name of Clarence West, Baines and West constructed this piece of equipment, generator broadcast. And he had a very inexperienced young man helping him. His total experience in constructing a radio station was being an electrician on a battleship during the first World War.

But, nevertheless, they finally got this piece of equipment ready to be tried; and lo and behold,



WALKER: they got out on the air. And it was a mystery that they were able to do this.

Then after it was on the air, it was a question of what to use it for. So Baines got the idea. He had this electric store by this time and was selling lighting fixtures and selling all kinds of parts for building your own radio. He got the idea of having people come in and take auditions and come back later and perform. He would not pay them anything, and he did not use their programming for money. He simply used it for experimentation, you might say.

After he had it in operation for a short time, there came a question of who was going to broadcast most of the things that went out over the air. Baines had so many other things he was involved in -- the light plant business and different things -- that I personally just sort of ended up using a mike which we installed right in the heart of the . . . the center of the store. We ran a wire from one side of the store to the other, and we had a mike with a handle on it with a pushthrough button where if you pushed it one way, you were on the air and if you pushed it the other way, you were off the air.

People would flock in there to sing, to perform, to play the piano, to play their horns, to play many different things; and they would have this chance to see whether they were good enough to come back. Of course, when they were doing this, they were not going out over the air.

So, when Baines put this radio on the air, as long as it was on the air no one in Terre Haute could get anything else on their privately-owned little radio set because his power was greater than any that could come in from the outside. We must remember that there were only a few radio stations in the United States. The top stations -- one of them was KDKA Pittsburgh. Another one was KFI Los Angeles. And another one was WMAQ, I believe, in Chicago. But there was a Chicago station.

Now, people turned on their radios not particularly to hear music or to hear anything but to see how far out they could get a station. That was the height of their glory if this one person could tell another one that he had KFI Los Angeles last night and the other guy says, "Well, the best I could do

WALKER: "was KDKA" or another one of the stations. One that was very popular was Kansas City where they had an orchestra that played there practically every night called "The Kansas City Nighthawks."

But when Baines would go on the air with his station, he would just simply blast out everybody else. Well, what they were doing was to get us a long-distance station, and here is somebody right down the street trying their best to knock 'em out of not getting that station. So he made enemies. It was not to his advantage.

In my part of the business, I was a little bit of everything. For example, if we would put the sports on the air at 6 o'clock, I would go around to the Jensens Jensen Bros. pool hall and take the information of the ball scores off of their big board. Then I would rush back around the corner to Baines and broadcast the baseball game (chuckles) . . . baseball results.

So, in order to fill in time, the American theater at that time maintained an orchestra. And Baines was able to run a wire down the alley and hook it on to the orchestra in the American theater. And in between times, we would put out some fairly good music.

FH: Did these other stations come in to the local station like they come into radio stations now from other stations?

WALKER: No, the radio stations that I have referred to or any others had no connection with each other. This was a simple little radio station, and it was not connected in any way. In fact, there was no such thing as what we call the chains in those days. In fact, that was a number of years later that the chains were formed.

FH: Although it was a Rose Polytechnic Institute station and had those . . . I guess you call them call letters, it was down in the Baines electric shop?

WALKER: It was down in the Baines electric shop right in his back room. The generator was on a balcony in that store room.

FH:           Then it never was out at Rose Poly? It was  
          in the Baines store.

WALKER:       It was in the Baines store.

FH:           What happened to that station then?

WALKER:       Baines had considerable trouble in the fact  
          that his station was interfering with stations  
          coming in from all over the United States. And he  
          made many enemies and lost a considerable amount of  
          his business over that station, which was from the  
          very beginning at 24 South 8th Street and was never  
          out at Rose Polytechnic Institute [to my knowledge].

FH:           How long was it there, Joe?

WALKER:       Well, I'm not sure. I was gone. I would say  
          it was there approximately two to three years, but  
          I'm [not sure as he went out of business].

FH:           Then what happened to it?

WALKER:       It went off the air. [I am not sure when  
          station WBOW came on the scene.]

FH:           Was it sold?

WALKER:       [I presume it was.] Now that's where I fall  
          out of the picture, pretty much, see, because I left  
          and got a job with a mill supply house -- Power  
          Supply Company. I really hardly know what . . . I  
          just knew that Baines went broke. He left Terre  
          Haute.

FH:           But you were the announcer and you were the  
          first announcer, and you were that for about two  
          years?

WALKER:       That's right.

FH:           While you worked for the Baines electric  
          company?

WALKER:       That's right.

FH:           Did you keep track of radio after that? Were  
          you still always interested in it?

WALKER: Yes, I've always been interested in it; and I have been involved in the sale of radios for some forty years. And have ended up in the . . . not only the radio business, but the television business as well.

FH: Did you have any other brand than Zenith?

WALKER: No. In this business of television, there's only one distributor in a territory. So, a distributor just does not have more than one line of television to sell to his dealers.

FH: And when you left Baines?

WALKER: I worked for a short time for a Mr. Ira McGlone, who was a C.P.A. accountant in Terre Haute. And then I had a problem with my eyes. In those days we didn't have the lighting that we know today. There would possibly be a 60-watt light bulb in the center of a 12-foot ceiling. I was compelled to get into another type of business and I became an office manager for the Power Supply Company that was a mill supply company here in Terre Haute. They went out of business a number of years ago.

FH: Then you went into your own business then?

WALKER: No. After my connection with the Power Supply Company . . . I left them about six months before they closed their doors. We were then by this time getting into what later became the Great Depression. And I went with a company known as the Kester Electric Company. And the Kester Electric Company was an old established company here in Terre Haute, and I went with them as an office manager. But as the economy worsened, it was responsible for the Kester Electric Company also becoming embarrassed and at a point to where they finally went into a receivership.

When they went into this receivership is when I started in the electrical wholesale business for myself and have been in this same type of business ever since, to this date.

FH: That was 1934?

WALKER: No, it was 1932. Nineteen hundred thirty-two.

FH: Now, the building where you started your business was an interesting building at 3rd and Walnut, wasn't it?

WALKER: I started my business at 817 Ohio Street, and I started there in a very small way. The building was owned by the Young family, and things were in such a low state that I was able to rent this building cheaply and get started in a very small way from then on.

In 1939, I then purchased the building at 3rd and Walnut Street after a considerable fire had wrecked the third floor of that building. I rebuilt it and use it to this day.

FH: Now, you really started your business with part of the stock that you bought from the Kester Electric Company?

WALKER: I started my business with practically all of the stock that I bought from the Kester Electric Company.

FH: After they went into receivership?

WALKER: After they went into receivership. They had this sale, and nobody came to the sale but myself and one other person. And I bought with the money that I had taken up actually out of the ground because the banks were failing here just one-two-three. . . . [I] took it to the sale and I bought practically everything that I could buy with what money I had at 10 cents on the dollar.

So, with that I started my experience which turned out over these many years as fairly successful.

FH: You didn't really have that money in the ground?

WALKER: Do you want me to tell you where it really was?

FH: If you want to.

WALKER: It was a silly thing. Now, I didn't go into detail there. I got the money because I had a real bad accident. I [used the money to buy the stock I mentioned.]

[Tape interrupted by Narrator.]

FH:               Where did you have the money hid, Joe?

WALKER:           I had the money wrapped with a piece of copper wire, and then I put a hook on that copper wire and dropped it down into the cold air duct. As you know, there are little holes in the cover of the cold air duct, and I just hung it down in there thinking that if the house caught on fire, possibly since it wasn't touching anything, that it would be safe.

FH:               This was paper money?

WALKER:           This was paper money.

FH:               And this was when the banks were closing, wasn't it?

WALKER:           This was when the . . . well, this was really . . . yes, it was when the banks were closing. And the banks were closed on the 3rd . . . or the 5th day of November, 1933. And that was a tragic thing that people just simply can't conceive of any more.

FH:               So, you were leery of the banks and you hid your money.

WALKER:           I opened a store at 817 Ohio Street and rented it from Mr. Sam Young, who used to have Young's Hotel down at 2nd and Wabash. He owned the building. And after some deliberation which is a nice word for fighting back and forth -- he rented me the building for \$75 a month, and I moved in at 817 Ohio Street. It was practically a new building, and the tenants up above were the well-known architects of Miller and Yeager. After a period of time we had this moratorium go into effect which closed all banks for three days. I had a telephone call from what now is the Terre Haute First National Bank. It was then the U.S. Trust Company. And I had a telephone call to come over there at once, that they were closing the bank at 11 o'clock on order from the government.

I practically raced over there. And at that time there had been four banks in Terre Haute downtown. But the U.S. Trust Company is where I went. I presented myself to one of the tellers, and he said, "Joe, we can only give you \$500. Now, that will have to last you until the banks are allowed to open again."

WALKER: So he gave me . . . counted out the \$500. And I took the \$500 and I went back to my business. I called my employees together. I had about 8 or 10 employees by that time. I went in business in 1932 and this was 1933. And I told them, "We have to all work together. I only have \$500 and we're going to have to hide it someplace. We're paying each one of you; now tell me just how much you have to have. I mean by that, \$10 or \$15 or \$20 or \$25 at the most, and maybe not many \$25 ones."

And I had about five men working for me in my motor repair shop, and we ended up with about eight people. And I said, "Line up." I stood at the desk and they'd come forward, and I'd say, "How much do you just have to have?" And they would say, "I have to have \$10." So, "Sign here," and I'd give them the \$10.

And we had no money . . . no one had any money. We trusted everyone and strangely enough, the people . . . we were all honest. We paid back what . . . we couldn't pay for our gas bill. Nobody bothered us. They'd call you on the telephone and tell you, "Now don't worry. We know, we're all in the same fix." And it was a cause of the closeness, bringing together of people. And it's why we withstood that tremendous depression -- the fact that we started out that way right on that first day. I had phone calls from the General Electric and from companies all over the United States because I did business with them, saying, "Don't worry. Don't worry. Don't send us any money. We have nothing . . . no place to put it. We would not know what to do with it. Keep it. Everything you have." And that is the way that I really got started in business. And it was . . .

FH: Nobody could pay you anything, and you couldn't pay anything, as I remember.

WALKER: That's right.

You could not put out a check because it wouldn't be good, see? So, the only thing that you had was just a little bit of cash. No matter who you were. You could be the wealthiest man in the world, but if you didn't have some cash on you, there was no chance to get any. A lot of people don't realize though



WALKER: that not all of the banks after three days were allowed to open. Only certain banks opened. The only two banks in Terre Haute that opened were the U.S. Trust (that is now the Terre Haute First) and the Terre Haute Savings Bank.

The one called the Citizens Bank -- the 12-story building -- never opened. The Terre Haute Trust Company never opened under that name. There wasn't any Indiana State Bank as I knew it in those days. I think they came along in later years.

FH: Were you married then, Joe?

WALKER: Oh, yes. I was married and I had a wife and two children.

FH: Do you remember how much you paid for a grocery bill for four people then? Per week?

WALKER: Oh, I would say \$10 to \$12. I would say or guess. I remember bread was five cents a loaf.

FH: How much was a beer?

WALKER: Well, you could get a bucket of beer for -- although I wasn't too much of a beer drinker in those days -- for, possibly, 15 cents if you wanted. That's the way a lot of people did in those days. The families did. They would send somebody over to the saloon and get a bucket of beer, bring it home and fill their glasses.

FH: It was a little pail with a handle, wasn't it?

WALKER: Yes.

FH: Why did you pick that particular location for your shop? Was that a good business location at that time?

WALKER: Well, it was a good business location, but it was a matter of getting a location of any kind for me because I had very little money and I had to find someplace where the rent was low. In the wholesale business it isn't necessary to be on Wabash Avenue, for example, like you would if you were in the retail business.

FH:                Would you have had to pay double that rent had you been on Wabash Avenue?

WALKER:           Oh, I'm sure I would have, although business was getting so bad that it didn't make too much difference where you were.

FH:                Were there a lot of vacant places on Wabash Avenue?

WALKER:           There were lots of places for rent but the thing with me was that part of my business was going to be like a machine shop, and I had to have a room with a solid concrete floor. I was offered a real good location at 3rd and Wabash by a man who at one time was postmaster by the name of Jerry Shandy, who said he would take the rent out in stock. He had a drugstore at 3rd and Wabash. And right next to him was an empty room that he owned. He was going to let me have it, and he would take it out in stock. But when I looked at the floor, it was an old wood floor and I had a machine called a lathe which simply had to be on a solid concrete base. So, I had to turn him down.

Now, if I had taken him up, if I'd accepted his proposal that he would take it out in stock, I owned such a small amount of stock that on a three-year rental basis, he would have had more stock than I. So, it was just by luck I wasn't able to accept that which I gladly would have done.

Then I found this location at 817 Ohio Street, and I went down to the Indois Hotel to see Mr. Sam Young about renting it. And he told me that I would have to pay him \$250 a month rent. And I said, "Mr. Young, that is out of the question. I do not have that kind of money." And I said, "Besides that, you're sitting there with an empty building. Now, I tell you what I'm going to do with you. I'm going to offer you \$75 a month for the first three months. And then I'm going to offer you \$100 for the next three months, per month. And then I'm going to offer you \$125 for the next three months." Have I got all of the months in?

FH:                That's nine months.

WALKER: Then I offered . . . "then I will offer you \$150 for the last three months. Then I will sign a lease for two years at \$250 a month."

Mr. Young looked at me as if I was out of my mind, and he said, "Young man, I don't know what you're thinking."

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

WALKER: "This is a very fine building. I built it, and it was used by the automobile agency until they went out of business, and I certainly am not about to take a fine building like that and let you have it for a little bit of nothing."

And I said, "Well, all right, Mr. Young. I've tried. But remember, the offer is still open."

And about three or four days later his son, Dick Young -- who later became a good friend of mine -- came to me and said, "Dad says he will take it."

So, I rented that first building there, and it was a good building and a good location and things were so cheap that I was able to work out an arrangement.

Now many people have no idea -- they can't comprehend -- what happened in those days. I will give an example that shows you what the situation was. An electrician by the name of Otto Dickie was an old electrician who had gotten a little bit too old to do work, but he was still capable of going out and putting in plugs and hanging lighting fixtures and things of that kind. But he just didn't have any money. He worked out of his house, and he just didn't have any business at all. He would come in to our place of business and walk all the way from way up on Maple Avenue carrying his tools in a little split basket on his arm. He walked probably two to three miles down to Walker Electric at 817 Ohio Street and sit there all day

WALKER: hoping that we would sell a light fixture which we did. And if he got a chance, why then he could go out and hang it. And you have to understand things of that kind to see what the situation was like.

FH: You probably only paid him a dollar or two to do that, didn't you?

WALKER: We really didn't pay him anything. We let him have the light fixture, and he would go hang it. And then . . . (everything was cash) and then he would come back with the money and keep his part and pay us for the light fixture. But it was a time of depression. Depression can be a terrible thing.

You see so many people lived on \$57 a month. That's what the W.P.A. [Works Progress Administration] paid. And it's amazing what those people did with that \$57 a month.

I used to sell radios to my dealers. They were little, small radios and they sold -- even in those days -- for, say \$29.95. The only entertainment that those people had was the radio. They listened to the different ones that were on at that time and sat home and listened to [Eddie Cantor sing], you know, that good times were just around the corner and all those songs that they sang.

But things got so bad because about 1937-38 President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt decided that he could take off the W.P.A., that things had got so that men ought to be able to get along and find themselves a job. And he took off the W.P.A. and our radio business just went to nothing.

Along about Thanksgiving time he saw his mistake and he put it back on. And immediately, the radio business picked up because that was the only entertainment that people in those days had was to sit home and listen to those Two Black Crows or Amos 'n' Andy. And at that time we had a radio station in Terre Haute -- WBOW -- and every night at 6 o'clock Si and Ezra [Guy Slover and Gene Morgan] would come on the air. They were two country guys; and they would talk for 15 minutes about their problems, their lives, their homes, their kids . . . . And they were so good that people would turn them on and wait for 6 o'clock to be sure that they got it

WALKER: on to hear Si and Ezra. I remember one time walking south on 8th Street, where I lived in those days, at 6 o'clock in the evening in the summer time. The doors of the homes were open. I listened to Si and Ezra for 14 blocks on my way home (chuckles) and never missed a thing. So, those were the kind of things that endured in those days.

FH: Well now radio station WRPI became WBOW.

WALKER: (simultaneously) WBOW. That should be in there someplace. I don't think I put it in. [I mentioned that before that I was not with Baines when the change came.]

FH: How long were you at that location with your business? On Ohio Street?

WALKER: Seven years.

FH: Then you went where?

WALKER: Then I went down to 3rd and Walnut Street.

FH: That building was an interesting building, wasn't it?

WALKER: That was an interesting building. There's an article here.

FH: Will you tell us about that building? Wasn't it formerly at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis?

WALKER: That's right. The main building is rebuilt fire walls. Originally it was a livery stable. A man by the name of Kersey had a carnival. He kept his horses on the first floor in the wintertime, and he had his merry-go-round and things like that up on the second and third floor. This was a three-story building. And he kept his feed and all that there, too. And then there was a man [who] had the front end of the building. There was no heat in any of the building at this time.

FH: A man had part of the building that . . . what did he use it for?

WALKER: There was a man that had part of the building who was a veterinarian. He would have . . . people would come in there with their horses and their dogs

WALKER: and all that. And there was an overhead door that opened up on 3rd Street, and it was just kind of a run-down type of location. In later years the General Furniture Company rented it. Mr. Kersey lost the building. The bank took it away from him. He failed on his mortgage and it was taken over by the bank.

And then the bank, trying to sell it, rented it out to the General Furniture Company to Mr. Louis Brown until they could sell the building. And they put the building up for sale, and I got the idea of moving because my business had grown so that I couldn't stay at 817 Ohio Street. I took an option on that building for \$15,000. And then they had to get General Furniture Company to move out.

Well, General Furniture Company didn't move out. And I don't mean anything wrong with this, but shortly after that there was quite a fire. And the fire burnt the third floor so that it had to be taken down, and the building ended up as a two-story building. I took it and remodeled it and made it into a usable building. But it was a two-story building and not a three-story building.

FH: Now, this building had been a mission building at the Fair and then didn't they tear it down?

WALKER: Now, the building had been the old mission building at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. Mr. Kersey went down there and bought that building. And in those days when they had a Fair -- World's Fair -- they didn't have cardboard fronts; they built them out of brick and stone and masonry. He had this old mission building torn down -- it was a brick building -- torn down, the bricks cleaned, and had all of the building materials loaded on flat cars and shipped up to Terre Haute. And then they took that same material and built this three-story building with it there on South 3rd Street.

South 3rd Street, when I took over that building, wasn't much of a street. It was pretty run-down and all, and many times I wondered whether I had made a mistake or not. But with the widening of the street and everything that has happened, it's become one of the best streets in town.

FH: Well, then later you bought the old air dome theater, which was Sam Young's, too, wasn't it?

WALKER: Yes, I bought the one on Ohio Street which a part of it had been the old air dome. The front part of it was built on later. But he had an air dome -- it was called a theater -- and they had put on plays there. People sat around out in the open air, and unless it poured down rain, why they had a play. And to this day, the stairs lead up to where the dressing rooms were back in those days when they were using it for a theater.

FH: Now, Sam Young was married to one of the Melville girls, and he had a theater company and Rose Melville was Sis Hopkins, wasn't she?

WALKER: That's correct! That's right. That's good to put in there.

Yes, it was a very unusual building and I have kept it. I have sold most of my business, but I've kept that building. I don't know why (chuckles) but I kinda hate to give it up.

FH: You're sentimental.

WALKER: Sort of sentimental.

FH: Now, over these years you were downtown a lot, and you saw a lot of changes and a lot of interesting things downtown. All businessmen used to eat in McPeak's, didn't they?

WALKER: Well, if you could get in, they did. McPeak's restaurant was something different and outstanding in the way of restaurants, as they go today. The room had a counter that was practically the full length of a long narrow store. I would say that . . . oh, you could probably get fifty or more people up to the counter. It had a high counter and stools. And then they had little tables along the side, and that's where the ladies could sit if they came in because the average woman didn't want to get up on one of those high stools with men standing there. They would be two deep waiting for their turn to get on that stool. So, the ladies would not want to get into waiting along with the men, so there were little tables at the side that they could use. But very seldom did they come in to McPeak's restaurant.



WALKER: Mr. McPeak was a tall, rangy man -- as I remember him -- with a white mustache and he stood at the cashier's window.

FH: What were the prices then? What were the steaks?

WALKER: The prices, of course, now would sound unreal because you could have a small steak for 15 cents. And if you wanted a real nice steak, why, of course, you could pay 50 cents and you got maybe a T-bone or something like that.

You had three eggs for a dime. I don't know how they came to three, but there was no such thing as two in those days. Three eggs for a dime and your fried potatoes were a nickel. And men just flocked into that restaurant. And there was never any problem. They sold no liquor of any kind. I forget now; I believe that a glass of milk was a nickel, a cup of coffee a nickel. One of the favorite items on the menu was their pies. Now, when you ordered pie, it was generally cut four ways. So, you got a fourth of a pie when you ordered, and in summertime one of their well-known and famous pies was cherry pie. And the average number of cherry pies a day was from 100 to 200 pies a day during the cherry pie season. So, that was some idea of the kind of food that they had there.

I used to eat there when I was a young fellow, and for four dollars and a half I could get a five-dollar meal ticket. I had a great longing for red raspberries, because they had them in just regular water glasses sitting on the back bar. And for 15 cents, which was really something, you could have a glass of red raspberries with cream. I used to sit and look at those things until I was practically hypnotized because I could not afford 15 cents. And I always remember the red raspberries. That was one of the treats that you got (laughs) -- just looking at them.

FH: Did men in more or less menial jobs and bankers and professional men all stand side-by-side at this counter and eat?

WALKER: That's right. It didn't make any difference what you were involved in as far as your labor or your way of life was concerned. You stood waiting your turn at McPeak's restaurant.

WALKER: I worked for the Vandalia railroad, and a young man and myself many times would walk all the way from the Union Station down to around 4th and Wabash because if you went in there and bought a 5-cent glass of beer, you could have a free lunch. And that is quite a walk, but we would do that maybe once or twice a week.

At that time I did not drink beer and he did, so we would walk along -- just like we have it today. It was not a smorgasboard but a . . .

FH: A bar?

WALKER: No, a . . .

FH: Salad bar?

WALKER: Salad bar. They would have -- like on our present salad bars -- plenty of different things to eat, and all you had to do is have that glass of beer. Well, since I didn't drink beer, I would eat and give him my beer. And he would get two beers. So that was the way . . . . Things were that tough that we would walk all the way from up on North 9th Street to 4th Street to get a 5-cent beer.

FH: What kind of food was there? Weren't there hard-boiled eggs?

WALKER: Hard-boiled eggs were very common on the bars of the saloons. They kept them there all the time.

FH: Did they have blind robins?

WALKER: Yes, they had those. That's a fish.

FH: Smoked fish.

WALKER: Smoked fish.

The thing that was really important in the way of how the people did in Terre Haute was the fact that they had so many places where you could gamble. The gambling houses were . . . many of them were very, I would say, elite. They were on the second floor of these buildings on Wabash Avenue. And one time I had the opportunity when I was a young boy, my father took me in the daytime -- they operated only at nights -- to a place around between 4th and 5th

WALKER: on Wabash called . . . the second floor was called "The Health Office."

FH: Was that by Ernestine Myers' father?

WALKER: No.

And I remember quite well him taking me up there and showing me. That was like on a Sunday morning, and they wouldn't be open. I was about 10 or 12 years old. There were just places along Wabash Avenue. There were two of them, or three, on Wabash Avenue. I always remember that one of them, they had their display case of their food they had (with ice), showing maybe steaks lying in there . . . on display there, you know. And, of course, they always had the ladies' entrance. That was around to the side for the ladies /and their gentlemen/ to come in. A lady didn't walk in the front door.

FH: Now, this was a gambling place?

WALKER: This was a gambling place /and restaurant/.

FH: Well, later weren't they between 8th and 9th Street, most of those gambling places? Up over the pool halls?

WALKER: /There were lots of these places but the high roller clubs were from 8th Street west to 4th Street./ The gambling place that I remember was called Heenan, Mike Heenan's. And Mike Heenan was along about where -- I'll compare it to another old place -- Cody's Hat Shop /was located/. /On the first floor/ Bill Cody had half of the building and this other well-known person had the men's /clothing/. Mike Heenan's gambling place was on the second floor there.

FH: Was it Herm Rassel?

WALKER: Herm Rassel. Yes, it was. In those days Terre Haute was quite a well-known town. It was a wide-open town. When I worked with the railroad, on my noon hour many times I would go down and stand under the sheds that they had in those days. The big St. Louisan'd pull in and would stay there maybe for 15 to 30 minutes, and people would get off and they would walk along the platform. And we had a man here in town who became very famous in not too good a way by the name

WALKER: of Donn Roberts. A fellow'd get off of the train and rush over and say, "Say, is all this true we hear about this Donn Roberts? Is he that kind of a guy?"

And, of course, we were about 19 years old, and we didn't know too much (chuckling) about Donn Roberts. But he was a nationally known personage. And it was unusual for that to get out . . . to spread all over the United States.

But, of course, we had . . . the red light district was quite well known. People that ran the red light district . . . many of them were honorable people outside of their one type of work. But the gambling and the prostitution and all of that was just sort of a way of life, and it was done in sort of a . . . not a rough manner, I guess maybe (laughing) you would say. But it was a different era.

FH: Do you feel that we were better off with a red light district than the way it is now?

WALKER: I definitely do.

FH: They had the protection of the police and they had health . . .

WALKER: Inspection.

FH: . . . inspection.

WALKER: Every week.

I know of a woman who spent part of her life as a prostitute down on the red light . . . on the line. She had a customer that visited her maybe once a week or whatever. And this customer, this man became infatuated with this woman, and he was the type of a fellow who didn't go out with girls at all. He drank beer. He sat around the fire house evenings when he wasn't working. He was an outstanding mechanic. So, he fell in love with this woman. And he said to her, "Will you marry me?" And she said, "No. I won't marry you in Terre Haute, but I will marry you someplace else." She said, "You and I could never make it off in your hometown." But she said, "I'll marry you and we'll move to Indianapolis." And he said, "O.K. All right."

WALKER: And so they did. They got married. And they moved to Indianapolis, and he was with the Big Four railroad. And he was a wonderful mechanic, and he had no trouble getting himself a job working on the passenger cars. They built passenger cars there and as time went on, he became general foreman and he had a lovely wife. She was straight as a die. They had no children. They were not . . . they weren't young. I would say he was 40 and maybe she was 40, or something like that when they were married.

FH: I think most of the girls on the line married.

WALKER: Yes.

Well, she took him in hand. He still liked his beer and he still liked to get drunk. But she took him in hand when she got him over in Indianapolis, and she said, "Now, you're not going to have anything to drink. You're not going to have one drop to drink except on Friday night and Saturday. Friday night after work and all day Saturday. Sunday morning you're sobering up. Monday morning you're going to work sober." He said, "O.K."

So, on Friday night . . . it happens that I had been in their home. They had a lovely home out in . . . . He came home, and he said, "Joe, get in the car with me. I want to go down and get some booze." So, I did and I waited out in the car, and he went in and he came out with about two quarts of whiskey. And we then went home.

Oh, he opened up one bottle and took a drink. Well, he handed the bottle over to me (laughing) and I took a drink right there in the car. Well, he got tight and finally, she puts him to bed. And he gets up Saturday and by noon he's back drinking again. And he gets tight again on Saturday night and then I wondered. I thought, by god -- I didn't know all about this thing -- I thought, what in the hell, she's really got something on her hands.

Sunday morning this fellow gets up. He's sober as a judge. He's eating a good breakfast. He don't look bad at all. And Monday morning he went to work just as sober as anything you ever saw.

WALKER: Now, I ran into a man years later and I said, "Do you happen to know this particular fellow that worked out at Beech Grove -- Beech Grove shops?" He said, "Hell, yes. I knew him. Why?" I said, "He was right smart of a boozier, wasn't he?" This guy looks at me and says, "Boozier? Why, that man wouldn't even take a drink!"

FH: (laughs) So, she straightened him out, didn't she?

WALKER: She straightened him out.

FH: Let's go back to McPeak's. Where was McPeak's?

WALKER: McPeak's was at 6-1/2 . . . or close to 6-1/2 and Wabash.

FH: And what other particularly outstanding businesses do you remember downtown or things that would be of interest -- stores or other restaurants or hotels or what went on in . . . other than the red light district?

WALKER: Well, of course, the Terre Haute House bar was quite a well-known place. And we, in those days, we had the Four Corners as they called it -- the four-cornered trotting track, which is now the stadium. And that four-cornered track was in what they called the American Association, and that was the top pacers and trotter events all over the country. And Terre Haute belonged to that association. In Terre Haute also there were two farms that raised race horses in Terre Haute. And one was the Ijams' farm and the other was the Paul Kuhn farm. And they would have the colt sales, and they would have their entertaining and everything in the Terre Haute House.

And one time my father was telling about this one fellow had won a lot of money at the track and he was in the Terre Haute House bar, and they got into some kind of an argument about one of his horses. So, he simply had them some way or other go out and get this horse and next thing they knew, he was leading it right in the saloon. (laughs)  
And . . . proves my point.

WALKER: But the Terre Haute House was the mecca, and there was -- and I guess it's still there -- I guess that picture of Axtell, the horse which sold for some hundred thousand dollars.

FH: They're gone now.

WALKER: Are they gone?

FH: Yes. There were two oil paintings.

WALKER: Yes. Axtell was the name of that horse. And Axtell was one of the fine horses -- bred horses -- ever to this very day in trotting and pacing horses. You will find the horse with the letters AX in front of it -- Axworthy, Axjim, Ax what -- that's the progeny of Axtell.

FH: Now, that was from the Warren Park farm . . . or the Ijams' farm, wasn't it?

WALKER: That was from the Ijams' farm. And the Ijams' farm was completely destroyed by the terrible tornado that hit Terre Haute along back there in those early days.

FH: Nineteen hundred thirteen.

WALKER: Nineteen hundred thirteen, yes.

Whether this means anything or not, my first schooling in Terre Haute was at the public school -- the Hulman. It was located on the southeast corner of 7th and Swan streets. My fourth grade teacher was Miss Flood.

Shortly after that, I moved away from Terre Haute and I didn't come back for several years. My brother and I were orphans. We lived with our grandparents; we lived with our aunts and uncles, and we moved back and forth. So, I was in the 7th grade when I came back.

FH: Now, you were always interested in the theater, and you took part in the Elks Minstrels and you sang. You were what? An M.C.?

WALKER: No, I was an end man.



FH: Black-faced end man?

WALKER: Black-faced end man. There was always four black-faced. They're in teams. There's two come on and joke and sing. And then they go off and while they're going off, the other two end men come on. The interlocutor is standing in the center of the stage, and he throws the jokes at you. And then when it comes ready for your song, well, then he'll say, "Joe Walker . . . well, now we have Joe Walker singing 'Darktown Strutters' Ball.' Let's hear it, Joe!"

FH: Let's hear it.

WALKER: Do you want to hear it?

FH: Yes.

WALKER: (laughs and clears his throat)

FH: Can you do it -- a little of it anyhow?

WALKER: Well, I can sing it all if I get my throat cleared.

FH: O.K.

WALKER: (clears throat)

FH: I find it difficult to understand why the blacks object so now to the end men.

WALKER: They sure do.

FH: They were real artists and something that the blacks should have been proud of, even if it was white men portraying blacks and having their faces dyed.

WALKER: We never ran them down in any way or made light of them or made fun of them or any way, shape, or form. We were always just the guys, you know, putting on the interlocutor and getting him in trouble and laughing and cutting up. And it was a fun thing.

WALKER: Well . . . (commences to sing)

I'll be down to get you in a taxi,  
honey. You better be ready 'bout  
half past eight. Now, dearie, don't  
be late. I want to be there when  
the band starts to playin' and  
remember, baby, when we get there,  
honey, two-steps, I'm a-gonna  
have 'em all. I'll dance right  
outta my shoes when they play those  
jellyroll blues, tomorrow night at  
the Darktown Strutters ball. Some  
ball.

FH: (laughs) Great!

WALKER: (laughs)

FH: How many years were you in the Elks minstrels?

WALKER: Oh, my. About . . . that book there is what?  
'Fifty-one?

FH: 'Fifty-two.

WALKER: 'Fifty-two. Oh, I would say about eight years  
it might be.

FH: You were also in the Elks Chanters then. Was  
that after that?

WALKER: Well, not particularly. Sometimes the Elks  
Chanters would be the minstrel show.

During the second World War, many of the Elks  
Chanters had to go away to the service. And we  
kept the Elks Chanters together by going out and  
performing on bond drives and anything we could do  
to help out, where singing would do some good.

FH: How would you go? Where would you go?

WALKER: We would charter a bus. Well, going back a  
minute, we would organize a minstrel show, and we  
would put it together -- today it would probably be  
called a package deal. And we would have our end  
men and we would sing the same songs, we'd tell the  
same jokes, wherever we went. And the chorus line

WALKER: always sang the same songs, so that we never had to rehearse. We had a show prepared, ready anytime some place called and wanted entertainment. And many times we would get on a bus at four o'clock in the afternoon and maybe drive several hours. I remember one time we went all the way to Richmond, Indiana, to be there in time for a big bond drive; and Governor Henry Schricker was the principal speaker. I know we sat back of Governor Schricker while he gave his pitch on the bond drive. Then we got up and we always sang these patriotic songs. And we had certain guys -- besides the end men -- that sang ballads. Then the end men would put on their show. And we'd put on a minstrel show. And going on the bus -- or sometimes there'd be three or four cars -- we'd go down to many places that had bond drives. We'd go to the different bases -- Atterbury and the one up at Rantoul, the air base, and all those places. We were always on the go. And we had that show down pat.

Now, Carl Jones was the interlocutor and if he wasn't -- the few times that he couldn't make it -- I would serve as interlocutor instead of being an end man. I'd get somebody else to take my place as an end man.

But that was quite a thing that we did because many's the time that we pulled back into Terre Haute at three and four o'clock in the morning and with guys going right out and having to go to work, you know.

FH: This was during World War II.

WALKER: That was during World War II.

FH: Now, what shows did you see, let's say the Grand, when it was the Grand Opera House? Did you see Will Rogers and "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and shows like that? Do you remember any of those shows?

WALKER: Well, I remember the outstanding one was "Ben Hur."

FH: That's when they had the horses on the stage.

WALKER: When they had the horses on the stage.

FH: And a chariot race.

WALKER: And . . . I don't know that . . .

FH: Did they have a treadmill that made it look real?

WALKER: They had it . . . they were on a treadmill and noise? Oh, my goodness. Of course, I'm up in the gallery. I was looking right down on them, and it didn't look like a chariot race at all. It looks like a bunch of horses trying to fall down! (laughs) Of course, if you were sitting down here where you had to have a screen in front of it, you just saw the horses down so far you know. They were just a-goin' to town.

But young fellows couldn't afford to go into the Grand or those other theaters. So, what we did, we went in the side door on Cherry Street and went up in the gallery. They'd take saucers along with them and if they didn't like what they saw . . . they used to have different types of shows and they would . . . there was a brass rail there, and they would beat on that brass rail with these saucers. (laughs)

FH: Now, that theater had a balcony and a gallery.

WALKER: And a gallery. That's right. And a very large stage. And I always remember one woman, Fritzy Schiff. One of the fellows that worked with me down at the railroad office was also a stage hand on the side. And he told about her getting so mad about something about her clothes, or whatever it was, that the curtain was about ready to go up and she still hasn't got what she's looking for. She's standing out in the middle of the stage naked, yellin' at these guys to get what she wants. And they're (laughing) just about ready to pull the curtain up when they finally got her back in the dressing room . . . got her off of the stage where she would have been right in the limelight.

FH: Well now, do you remember any other particular acts at the theaters, that you haven't forgotten? In vaudeville or the stock companies here?

Well, now, Joe, over the years you've used many kinds of transportation and . . . tell us your

FH: experience with trains. You worked on the railroad. Didn't you find them a very satisfactory way of transportation?

WALKER: Well, of course, they [the railroads] were the best we had. In other words, there wasn't something better, so you really felt you had the best that was available.

However the condition of the coaches when you got into the passenger service as such outside of railroading was another thing. You could either have train coaches, or you could have those kind that smelled like black smoke. And for so many years people put their windows up when the train was moving; and when they did, that black smoke came into the coach. And it eventually got into the upholstery. And I can remember as a little boy, going from Petersburg, Indiana, to Terre Haute and back and forth -- lying on one of those trains trying to go to sleep and the smell of that coach would smell just like smoke.

FH: It was velour . . .

WALKER: The coach seat.

FH: It was velour upholstery that held the smell, wasn't it?

WALKER: Yes. I think it was.

And the trains really weren't too [well kept]. They were just pretty ordinary in trying to be of service to the public. There were a few fancy trains, you might say, deluxe trains -- like the one that used to go between Chicago and New York every night and all those kind of things and the St. Louisan which came from New York to St. Louis. But most of them were just smalltown [trains] along the route they serviced, and they paid very little attention to the coaches or to the passengers.

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2-SIDE 1

WALKER: The passenger side of railroading, the railroad people claimed, lost them money. That never made them any money at all. And they put their emphasis completely on their freight haul. That was the important thing. In fact, most of the big shippers all had passes that they used all the time. It was a good type of transportation for shipping of freight but as far as taking care of the public, it had an awful lot to learn. As far as taking care of the public and producing something better as time went along, they did not do that.

FH: In this area the main freight was coal, wasn't it?

WALKER: The main area here, yes, was coal. And the main area, of course, like in the Middle West or Wyoming and Nebraska was like grain. They built certain cars for certain types of shipping. Of course, they had the old original box car. That was the one that hauled an awful lot of odds and ends of freight of all kind. But the coal train, they had two kinds of coal cars. One is called the hopper car and the other was called a . . . let's see, a hopper car and a gondola. Gondola. Imagine a coal car being called a gondola, but that was the trade name for that particular type of coal car.

FH: Well now, the streetcars, of course, you remember well. Did you feel they were a satisfactory mode of transportation?

WALKER: (chuckles) Well, they were all we knew! And until the jitney bus arrived on the scene, I don't think the Terre Haute, Indianapolis & Eastern Traction Company ever went out of their way to make things too good for the traveling public. But they served their purpose. In the summertime when they had those open-air cars where you had the platform along the side and you just stepped up and sat down . . . You know, the seats went all the way across. Why, they were kind of nice on a warm Sunday evening. For example, you could get on one of those streetcars and you could ride all the way over to West Terre Haute, and you could ride all the way back, clear up to Highland Lawn hill. And then you could ride all the way back and get off (laughs) wherever you wanted to get off, and all for a nickel. And that was quite a nice, pleasant Sunday night breezy, cool, nice ride.

WALKER: And a lot of the streetcars ran up to Collett Park. Collett Park was the big noise in those days, especially on Saturday and Sunday night. That's where the girls and boys met. And they always had a band concert up there, and one could buy popcorn and what-have-you. It was that type of a park.

Of course, in the earlier days when I was about a 10- or 12-year-old young boy, we had Lakeview Gardens. There's a lot of people don't know or never heard of or maybe have, but there was such a park as Lakeview Gardens. Now, Lakeview Gardens was later out where the Trianon was and they had a lake there. I suppose it was about that deep [illustrates with his hands], and they had boats that you could -- or canoes, I forget which it was -- that you could rent for you and your girl friend, you know, and go for a little ride around the pond. That was a permanent thing. It stayed open all summer. And they had their Ferris wheel and the different types of entertainment, just about like they do now [at fairs] except they're not so fancy. Lakeview Gardens was, of course, not too far away from the track -- the race track. And they were places in the summertime that the streetcars were loaded going back and forth, and most of them were these open cars.

FH: Was the ballpark out there, too?

WALKER: Well, the ballpark was there. That's right. And that's where Mordecai Brown, the famous pitcher who had the bad hand . . . . His hand had been mutilated in some way and he was called "Three-finger Brown." He was the champion pitcher for the Chicago Cubs. And I know one time in spring training (I was about 12 years old -- I'm guessing now), the Detroit Tigers had won the American pennant and the Chicago Cubs had won the National pennant and they were going to spring training. On their way back . . . they'd been to spring training, I meant to say, and on their way back to Detroit and Chicago because [it] was Mordecai Brown's home, they stopped in Terre Haute and played an exhibition ball game. And when they did, the scorecards that they sold at that ball game, on the reverse side was a picture of Mordecai Brown's hand. My father bought that scorecard so that I could have it, and I kept it like kids do for years. I'd show it to the kids, you know, "Did you ever see Mordecai Brown's hand?" It was a knarled hand. But



WALKER: that was quite an entertainment part of the city out there really.

FH: Now, did you ever ride the interurban?

WALKER: Oh, yes. I rode the interurbans a good many times. I rode the interurbans to where they made me sick at my stomach. When they traveled -- I presume not too fast -- they went up a hill and down dale (laughs), and then they went this way (illustrating by movement) back sideways, too, so they were not too much of a pleasure. There was a regular network of interurbans. There was one interurban line went to Sullivan. There was one interurban line that went to Paris, Illinois. There was one interurban line that went to Clinton, Indiana. And then there was one interurban line that went to Indianapolis. And in Indianapolis they had a huge place where they had it covered, a place for all those interurban cars that came in and it was big business.

And down in Evansville, they had one that went up to Rockport. That's where my folks originated. And I remember riding on it. I really got sick because it went back and forth. You know (laughs) the car did and also went this way. So, naturally -- I was just a young kid, too, I believe -- and I got sick at my stomach.

FH: It was the invention of the automobile putting jitneys into operation that helped put the streetcars out of business. Now, what do you remember about the jitney?

WALKER: (chuckles) Well, I don't know who got the idea of using . . . they were Fords, most of them. There was so much complaint to the traction company about the streetcars. They didn't pay any attention, really, to the cars or to the tracks or anything. They just kind of let it rip. And people got terribly upset. They raised a lot of heck about it but it didn't do any good. And some guy came along one day and showed up on a corner, say up on Locust Street, and said, "Hey!" -- there'd be four or five standing there waiting -- "Hey, you guys and gals, want to take a ride?" And, "Sure!" and they'd all pile in.

WALKER: Well, that was the beginning of the jitney bus. This guy gets to thinking about this thing. And he thinks, "Hey, I didn't have any trouble picking that up. If I'd charge them a nickel apiece, I'd have had 25 cents." So, the next morning, why there he is again. And he's always just a little bit ahead of that streetcar coming. So, he says to himself, "I'm going to tell them if you want a ride now it's going to cost you a nickel." So, he stops his car, and these people all started to get in. So, he says, "Wait just a minute. Now you're going to have to pay today." "Oh, no!" they say "We're not going to pay you anything. What the heck! We'll just get on the streetcar." Then, he says, "I'll get you there a lot faster. You won't have to sit around getting on that darned old streetcar." "Well, O.K. Let's try it." So, they all pile in -- you know, the more the merrier. And away they went and he says, "By golly, I got something going here."

So, the next morning he was there; and the next morning some other guy hears about this thing on South 7th Street and says, "Hey, did you hear about what that guy up on Eighth Avenue's doing?" Or what that guy on Locust Street's doing? And in a very short time, the thing spread all over Terre Haute. And people rode them. They piled into them. The girls a lot of time sat on the boys' laps because there wasn't anyplace else to sit. If you sat up in front they didn't have any heaters. There was no such thing as a heater. And what they did, they took the floorboard out on the driver's side, and there was a red-hot what they called manifold. Red hot. And (laughing) you could spread a lag in there and that heat would come right up in that car. But you had to be very, very careful (laughs) that you didn't catch something on fire and something that's kind of important, maybe.

FH: (laughs)

WALKER: But those jitneys, the traction company just fought them tooth and toenail. And finally, they finally won out. They forced them off the road.

FH: Did you have girls sit in your lap in the jitney?

WALKER: Well, I don't think I could have been in a jitney without having a girl sitting on my lap, because he took so many people on you had to.

FH: Were these girls you knew?

WALKER: No. I didn't know them. They were just there. And then, of course, you'd stand on the corner to come home at night. And at that time I lived up on Third Avenue. I would ride to Locust Street and then walk three blocks up to Third Avenue because they didn't run on . . . they only ran on certain streets. They didn't run on every street.

FH: They didn't run entirely on the streets that had streetcars though, did they?

WALKER: They ran on streets that didn't have streetcars. But generally, they ran on the ones that had streetcars, because [the jitney driver would say,] "They're either going to be riding with me or they're going to be on that streetcar." I don't think . . . looking back I can't see now them being on a street that didn't have a . . . they were very strong like on South 3rd Street.

Back in those days, South 3rd Street wasn't paved. It had double tracks running down 3rd Street. And, of course, I'm not sure whether they went past Hulman Street or not, but I know they went at least to Hulman Street, the streetcars.

They were just something of an era that came and went. It carried the name jitney, (laughs) and the young folks got a big bang out of it.

But people in those days didn't have cars. Everybody didn't have a car. Now you look back it seems that everybody always had a car. But you didn't have . . . everybody didn't have a car. They couldn't afford one.

[A portion of the tape has been deleted here at the request of Mr. Walker.]

FH: Can you think of anything else about Terre Haute that you'd like to say? You've never been sorry you came here and stayed here, have you?

WALKER: No, I have never been sorry. I'm very proud and pleased that I had . . . made my way in life from nothing to a little bit of something. (chuckles) And I did it right here . . . there's the old song, "I Did It My Way."

FH: You feel that Terre Haute really gave . . . did give in those days . . . gave people opportunities and do you feel it still does?

WALKER: I think there's opportunities always for people. I think you have to make opportunities. They don't just all of a sudden one city is so much better than another city. You have to make opportunities.

When I went in business, I was told by everybody that had anything to do with me, that I would be gone and out in six months. Well, I had made up my mind when I was working in a railroad office -- looking out the window, standing up on about the fifth floor of a building in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania -- that one of these days, I'm not going to be in this railroad; I'm going to be running something. I'm going to be a businessman. I had a goal! And I tried to be a businessman.

[A few lines have been deleted here.]

WALKER: I have great respect for Terre Haute. And I don't know where I could have gone and done better.

FH: Well, Joe, you've lived through many changes in the world, and do you mind if I ask how old you are?

WALKER: Oh, no, I don't mind. I'm 85. I was 85 last December the 4th. God willing, I'll be 86 December the 4th this year.

FH: (laughs) Well, we appreciate your interview and taking time to meet with us, and we know that many people will be interested in all the things you've had to say about Terre Haute and its history.

Thank you very much.

WALKER: Well, thank you, girls . . . ladies.

END OF TAPE

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